

THE EDUCATION OF A MISTRESS

I was reading an article in Esquire
entitled "Class -- some have it, some don't,"

and then I wandered in to the bathroom
and there hanging from the shower-curtain rod

were two of my three shirts
(the third was on my back)
and they were recently laundered and dripping dry.

That meant that even though you are not speaking to me
and have been sleeping on the couch the past three nights,

you did my shirts along with the other laundry.
That is the most class you have shown

in the six years we've been together,
especially when one considers

that you must have had to overcome the temptation
to shrink them in the dryer.

We do have a ways to go though, don't we, dear:
you might have mentioned the split in the seat of
my pants.

DON'T REST ON YOUR LAURELS

God, I couldn't begin to count
how many times I heard that phrase as a kid.

It was a favorite of my father.
When he'd discern me lingering a bit too rosily
in the afterglow of some minor achievement,
he would swiftly endeavor to rescue me
from the jaws of complacency:

"You have every right to be proud of yourself ...
BUT DON'T REST ON YOUR LAURELS!"

It's a funny phrase actually -- so Grecian and semipoetic
-- so unlike my poems,

which he probably wouldn't consider much of an accomplishment anyway -- my mother certainly doesn't -- though, who knows, he might surprise me, he died before I began to publish, and he'd always gone along with everything else I perpetrated.

Another funny thing, though, is that he had no laurels, in the common usage, to rest upon himself. Please please please, don't think I'm putting him down for that. I went without nothing. He suffered my mother for my sake. Most importantly, he always made it clear to me that I was loved by him.

He was the most lovable man I ever knew. All my aunts envied my mother. Men with fingernails that would never come clean wept at his funeral. I wept for three days running and have not altogether stopped.

In truth, however, he had never striven for fame or money or creative excellence or a much better job or anything else that one would ordinarily associate with "laurels." I don't mean that he didn't work hard. He worked much harder than I can imagine (much harder, it goes without saying, than I do) and, a handyman, he did a lot for others in his off-hours.

But he did sit around his share also -- at ballgames and Sunday family dinners and in the bars with his friends and on Monday night with me, playing chess and watching "I Love Lucy" and Brian Donleavy in "Foreign Intrigue." He sipped Imperial blend backed by water.

No, listen, please understand, I'm not putting him down for that. I wish I were sitting on his lap right now.

And I realize that by the time I knew him he had come back from the war, a man weakened by diabetes,

and I know that his advice was sound. I know that people when they retire, for instance,

have a tendency to die,
and you don't have to travel far to find examples
of people who are resting, not even on their laurels,
but solidly on the seat of their pants.

Still, why, when I spend a few hours with my kids,
should I find myself asking,
"Is this another insidious way of resting on one's laurels?"

Old man,
(which is what I think we called each other)
I realize that I teach shamelessly few hours
and that I have some of my summers off,

but still
sometimes I think I need a rest.

CHARLIE BURCH

Vodka and root beer?

I've mixed vodka with just about everything imaginable,
not just your tonics and juices,
but coke and milk and tap water,

and if holy water were the only thing available
I'd probably mix it with that.

But vodka and root beer?

That is an affront to human innocence,
to our memories of childhood-as-Eden,
to merry-go-rounds and bicycles and fishing poles.
Not even Dylan Thomas would drink vodka and root beer.

Smirnoff, your boys on Madison Avenue
have gone too far this time.
We're a corrupt people, to be sure
(what people isn't either decadent or hypocritical?)
but we haven't hit rock bottom.

THE FIFTY-FIRST WAY TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER

Chopped up in her flower pots.